

*Full Length Research Paper*

# **The impact of China on the agency and negotiating power of African countries: Cases of Angola and Niger**

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**The recent surge in cooperation between China and African countries challenges the western aid model thus giving African countries a better leverage and negotiating power in their relation with the west. It is obvious that the Chinese presence in Africa is motivated by its economic and energy security agenda, which consist in securing natural resources to ensure security of supply and demand in its domestic market. This paper argues that the growing importance of China in Africa coupled with its unconventional aid model has increased its agency vis-à-vis western countries. The case study of Angola and Niger reveals that their bargaining power vis-à-vis the west has increased as a result of their relation with China. However, it is also important to point out that they do not have the same level of agency in regards to their relation with China: Angola derives a stronger bargaining power and is more assertive than Niger.**

**Key words:** African agency, Angola, Niger, China, Western countries, natural resources.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Many reasons drive African countries to engage with China. Chinese model of economic growth is one of these motives. As Moyo (2009) argues in *Dead Aid*, the presence of China can be perceived as a good asset for Africa's development. According to her, Africa should imitate Chinese model of economic development because it is pragmatic and growth oriented. Bräutigam (2010) argues that China bases its cooperation on infrastructure, productive activities and self-development whereas DAC members emphasized on social issues. This pragmatic relation with China could not only make African countries economic prosperous but will also more responsible as they are given agency over their own future development goals. As Fan Guijin, former Chinese

ambassador to Malawi argued, "no country in the world can develop itself through foreign aid ... To develop your economy is your job. You have to do it yourselves" (Masina, 2008). Former Senegalese president Abdoulaye Wade previously brought forth this point of view by stipulating "I've never seen a country develop itself through aid or credit. Countries that have developed — in Europe, America, Japan, Asian countries like Taiwan, Korea and Singapore — have all believed in free markets. There is no mystery there. Africa took the wrong road after independence" Onishi (2002).

Economic development being a major concern for the continent, many countries engage with China in order to learn from its model of economic development (Mehari,

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2019). Also, China's aid system which is pragmatic and based on commercial activities is what attracts African countries. Chinese aid takes the form of a FDI contrary to OECD/DAC countries' aid model, usually short of commercial loans and infrastructure projects. China offers package loans that include investment by Chinese companies, infrastructures building, concessional loans, debts reliefs, project investment, training and technical assistance (De Haan A., 2010). Political and Economic conditions experienced by African countries could also explain their move towards China. Indeed, the failure of the Structural Adjustment Policies designed by the IMF in the 1980s and 1990s, engendered a deleterious political and economic atmosphere in which many African politicians and leaders needed a new source of financial support. Therefore, China became popular because of its ability to negotiate quick transactions and it does not relinquish to offer aid to these countries considered corrupted and non-respectful or human right abuses (Mahoney, 2010). China's policy of non-interference and its emphasis on trade and economic relation is welcomed by African countries who see in him a partner engaged in a win-win relationship. Contrary to the west, China does not try to lecture African countries but rather consider them as partners engaged for mutual benefits. Also, due to its willingness to invest in the domestic economy of the recipient countries, China is preferred to western donors whose policies are based on promoting transparency, democracy, human rights, etc. In addition, these policies and institutions do not necessarily translate into economic growth. As former president of Africa Jacob Zuma argues, "as long as economic development on the continent doesn't improve, democracy cannot become well established. People who are hungry aren't interested in listening to fine speeches." (Vollgraaff, 2010). Many recipients prefer the Chinese model because it is pragmatic and helps to solve their imminent questions of economic growth (Moyo, 2009) and their need for basic infrastructures to sustain their development and pragmatic assistance. Last but not least, Chinese aid model has the propensity to go along the aspirations of these recipients and does not undermine their needs for sovereignty contrary to western aid which usually interferes in their domestic affairs (Dambisa Moyo, 2009). In this vein, China has succeeded in courting recipient African countries and is now considered a "recipient darling" in Africa. However, this relation is mostly oriented towards extractive industries leading many people to consider it non-sustainable. However, the extractive industry amounts only to 1/3 of Chinese total investment in Africa, and the remaining 2/3 being found in infrastructure, construction, electricity production, manufacturing and finance (Mehari, 2019). It is also interesting to point out that China's investment in the mining sector in Africa is lower than the United States and other developed countries (Mehari, 2019). Historically under the yoke of western colonialism and

imperialism by the end of the nineteenth century, the destiny of Africa has always been decided by external actors even after their independence in the 1960s. The influence of these external actors on the political economy of Africans countries has placed them in a weak position, leaving their destiny at the hands of these external actors.

Africa itself has always been described and analyzed from the viewpoint of these external actors with few or no accounts of its internal perspectives and its capacity to be an assertive partner. The narrative on Africa is usually that of a continent of chaos, along with the tropes of violence, underdevelopment, poverty, and dependence on external capitalism. In the international arena, Africa has always played the position of a passive agent, holding a weaker position in its relation with developed and much established powers. The continent has always been the passive subject of external actors, usually depending on their insights and conceptions of the world. During the 2000s, a decade after the end of the cold war, the world structure has shifted from unipolar after the end of cold war to multipolar, with the emergence of new economic powers in the peripheral world. The increased cooperation with these emerging powers such as China, India, and Brazil has led many African countries to economic prosperity and integration in the world economy. This cooperation also constituted an alternative partnership which could lead to the increased assertiveness of African countries vis-à-vis western powers.

This research explores agency in the domain of international relations from the perspectives of African countries. It goes along studies previously done by Clapham (1996), Bayart (1993), Brown and Harman (2013) on the assertiveness of countries in the developing world such as the African continent. Throughout this research our objective will be to see how this part of the world often called the periphery is being assertive in its engagement with both China and western countries.

## THEORETICAL ANALYSIS

The agent versus structure problem has always instigated lots of debates and disputes in the domain of social sciences. These debates have presented the two concepts in the dichotomous setting of "individual and society," "action and structure," "individualism and holism," "voluntarism and determinism", subjectivism and objectivism" (Carlsnaes, 1992). The central issue of the debate evolves around who has primacy over the other, in other words can activeness and free choice be purported to the agent or is it conditioned by the structure?

The first dimension of the agent-structure debate presents the agent as interpretative, purpose oriented, while the structure is described as enabling but also

constraining and regulating the scope of the agent (Alexander, 1988). The agent is seen as the primary source of social order, liberty of choice and considered as the ultimate determinant of the structure. As Karl Popper eloquently illustrates “all social phenomena, and especially the functioning of all social institutions, should always be understood as resulting from the decisions, actions, attitudes, etc. of human individuals. We should never be satisfied by an explanation in terms of so-called 'collectives'" (Popper, 1966). The second dimension of the debate perceives the structure as the primary source of social order and describes action as the objective pursuit of interests. The relationship between agency and structure is tendered in terms of some form of structural determination in which individual action is conceived as a function of social order. That is, the individual acts and behaves according to the norms prescribed by the structure, meaning that the structure defines the individual. From this perspective, the structure restricts the capability of the agent to freely act and purposefully project itself.

Perry Anderson, defines agency from the three dimensional perspectives of routine conduct, public initiatives and self-determination. The first type of agency can be defined by the ‘pursuit of private goals, cultivation of a plot, choice of a marriage, exercise of a skill, maintenance of a home, bestowal of a name’. The second form of agency is manifested through existing social relations such as ventures in public goals which include activities as ‘political struggles, military conflicts, diplomatic transactions, commercial explorations’. The third type of agency involves the collective pursuit of social transformation by agents. Examples of these social transformations could be the American and French revolutions.

In International politics, Agency is commonly defined as the ability for the agent to exert power over the structure (Buzan et al., 1993 cited in Wight 1999; Wight, 1999; Brown and Harman, 2013). It describes the ability for the agent to act independently of any external coercion, which brings to our mind the notions of free choice and free will (Barker, 2005). Agency relates to the ideas of power and assertiveness of the individual endowed with the ability to impose his/her will with regard to circumstances and situations affecting his/her own life (Cohen, 2017).

Negotiating power is defined as the ability to exert influence in a negotiation. It describes a person’s position in a particular negotiation as compared to his counterparts. The concept of negotiating power is assessed by how much it costs each party engaged in a negotiation to reach an agreement. These costs usually affect how each side negotiates, meaning that people are better and stronger negotiators when they are nothing to lose. The concept of negotiating is related to different concepts that include: Best alternative to a negotiated agreement, which relates to the alternative choices and opportunities beyond the negotiation. For instance, a

person that has more than one alternative in a negotiation has more negotiation power because he can choose the alternative that best suits his interests.

Bargaining leverage refers to the level of authority parties engaged in negotiation exert on each other. This authority is manifested through punishment or reward. In a negotiation context a person that enjoys more authority will have more leverage than the one with no formal authority.

Information asymmetry describes a situation where a person engaged in negotiation has better information than his counterpart. This creates an imbalance of power, whereby the party having better information increases his negotiation power over the one having less information. Negotiation in the African context is founded on the respect of kinship relations, elder roles, and the structure of local society. In many countries in Africa, people are organized in extended families, village, lineage, and lineage groups. Elders have a strong impact on people’s lives and maintain social norms, and by their presence make the need of formal laws minimal. They are usually seen as a source of wisdom and knowledge and can sometimes have a strong impact on negotiation and when they intervene in negotiation, their words are respected. The important place played by elders in negotiation is highlighted by Amadou Hampaté Bâ, who famously stated “in Africa when an old man dies, a library has burned.” (Evans and Montaner, 2012) For instance in Nigeria, people are organized in extended families (nnu’), village (idu’ or obio), lineage (’duk), and lineage groups (iman) (Offiong, 1997). Negotiations are done through social networks under already prescribed roles. In some societies negotiation has for objective to restore social cohesion and individual difference are sacrificed in the interest of the group. In Africa, negotiation always aims to reach a positive outcome without “ a residue of bitterness or resentment” (Offiong, 1997).

In China, Guanxi refers to the idea of “gate” and “connection”, which means that “one must pass the gate to get connected to networks” (Cheng, 2007). It also describes the relationships and social connections based on mutual interests and benefits (Yang, 1994). From these perspectives, we could stipulate the concept of “guanxi” presents some similarities with that of kinship in Africa. Both practices emphasize respect and obedience towards elders as basis for social attitudes. However, guanxi is more about building a network of relationship with people from whom we expect favor and services. Also, reciprocity in guanxi is very important given that the people who gave us favor expect to be given favor in return.

### **African Agency: Increased negotiating power in the international arena**

African agency prevails in multilateral meetings such as

inter-governmental negotiations of the World Trade Organization (Lee, 2011), and the United Nations system (Zondi, 2011)<sup>1</sup>. It is also apparent in the context of bilateral relations between aid recipients and donor countries, in which case recipient countries in Africa, engage donors individually with the aim of negotiating a better deal. Also, regionally, through intra-regional organizations such as the African Union (founded in 2001), Africa has gained a continental and international presence (Zondi, 2011; Tiekou, 2011). The African Union, contrary to its predecessor, the Organization of African Unity (OAU), is playing an important role in multilateral organizations, in humanitarian and security issues. It is also taking an active role in conflict resolution in the continent through military interventions.

The growing assertiveness of Africa on the international sphere mainly stems from the change in the configuration of the international system which has as a consequence, the emergence of a “uni-multipolar hybrid” system characterized by an increased role played by new (alternative) economic powers from the developing world (Huntington and Broomley, 2009; Zondi, 2011). The possibility to have alternative partners has driven many African states to display a high level of assertiveness and diplomacy in their relation with traditional partners, especially in issues related to climate change, trade, aid disbursement, and intervention norms in the continent (Brown and Harman, 2013). John Dramani Mahama, the former president of Ghana argues in this vein that the emergence of countries such as China, India, and Brazil constitutes an alternative source of much needed investment for Africa and developing countries, which will not have to accept the prescriptions of traditional aid institutions<sup>1</sup>. This emergence of new poles of influences has led to a shift of political and economic powers, giving African states the opportunity to engage with new and unconventional donors who do not necessarily subscribe to the social, political and economic ideals of the west as they do not attempt to interfere in their internal issues. For instance, the cooperation between African countries and China (the main representative of these emerging powers) has enabled many countries in the continent to claim ownership of the development policies or resist policy injunctions from international institutions or even negotiate to obtain a better deal. From a theoretical perspective, the study of African agency means shying away from the rhetoric of Africa being seen as a victim of exploitation by its partners<sup>2</sup>, but rather apprehending it as an assertive and active agent capable of taking initiatives in order to protect its interests (Alden, 2007; Brautigam,

2009; Zhu, 2010; Kalu, 2012; Corkin, 2013; Mohan and Lampert, 2013; Lampert and Mohan, 2015)<sup>3</sup>. With the growing presence of China in Africa, many countries have learned to be very pragmatic and tactically play the “China Card” in order to solicit renewed interest from western countries (Campos and Vines, 2007; Corkin, 2008b; Corkin, 2013), or sometimes play the two sides against each other (Struye de Swielande, 2009).

However, it would be relevant to ask how this agency is manifested and whether all the countries on the continent enjoy the same level of agency in regards to their engagement with China and western countries.

In their research on the agency of African states, Whitfield and Fraser (2010) contended that recipient countries are influenced by internal structural conditions (Economic, ideological, political and institutional conditions) which have an impact on their decision-making while engaged in negotiation<sup>4</sup>.

For them, these structural conditions have a strong impact on the negotiating capital of recipient countries<sup>5</sup>. Referred to as the ever-changing elements that influence the players in negotiation, these conditions help to guide and define the recipient's preferences and strategies in a negotiation. Their study mainly highlights the fact that some countries enjoyed a high level of bargaining power while others could not leverage the same level of bargain in their engagement with western donors. Other scholars have looked into the African agency in the context of the Sino African relations. For instance, Kalu (2012) in her study of Chinese engagement with Nigeria argues that Nigeria and Nigerians are very active in their engagement with China and should not be seen as pawns of China. Her study shows the active participation of Nigeria and the impact this relation has on Nigerians in terms of business opportunities, access to affordable goods, and so forth. Africa through its institutions and states actors are motivated to engage with China for the sake of their interest such as obtaining financial support and infrastructure projects development. In their investigation of Angola's relation with China, Mohan and Lampert (2013) and also Corkin (2013) highlight the Angolan agency in dealing with China's investment and aid. Corkin (2013) gives an account of how the Angolan

1. In the United Nations negotiations on climate change, countries like South Africa, Sudan and Ethiopia have risen to prominence by acting as a block in order to safeguard their common interests (Zondi 2011; Hoste 2011; Chevallier 2011).

2. Afrique Chine.Net (10 April,2012), L'Afrique se tourne vers la Chine pour son financement, retrieved from <http://www.afriquechine.net/fr/2012/1+afrique+se+tourne+vers+la+chine+pour+son+financement.php>

3. With the emergence of China as the new partner in Africa, studies and researches on Africa's relation with China usually emphasize on the continent being determined by Chinese imperialism and neo-colonialism.

4. These researches mainly focus on the assertiveness of Africa negotiating with China in order to get the best bargain in accordance with their interests. For more information on aid ownership and recipient authority over policies; see Van de Walle and Johnson (1996), Killick (1998), Karshenas, M. (2000), Booth (2003) and Koeberle et al. (2005), Easterly (2006), Booth, (2011). These Studies have focused on recipient ownership and encouraged Home grown policies in the detriment of externally imposed ones. We understand ownership as the authority recipient countries have on the implementation of their own policies without any foreign intervention.

5. Structural conditions are understood as the “ever changing global and national economic, political, ideological, and institutional contexts in which donors and recipients define their preferences and select their strategies” (Whitfield, L., & Fraser, A., 2010:346).

government manages Chinese credit lines and how it engages China to gain the most advantage in their partnership. Mohan and Lampert (2013), for their part, look at the strategies used by the Angolan state to negotiate Chinese investment projects and also how social actors in Ghana and Nigeria have managed to gain benefit from the presence of Chinese migrants. For Odoom (2013), Ghana's cooperation with China has helped to address its infrastructure needs and develop its infant industries, that is, the oil and gas sector which are less developed. This agency is not only visible at the state level, but it also manifests itself at the micro level where local social actors voice their disagreement against competition from Chinese traders and miners. Therefore, contrary to the opinion put forth by the mainstream literature on China-Africa relations, African countries are aware of their interests and very assertive in their engagement with China as shown in the examples of Ghana, Nigeria and many other countries.

However, how this agency is leveraged and whether all African countries have the same level of agency remain interesting questions to ask. In order to investigate these questions, we will look into the agency used by Angola and Niger in their relation with China and traditional donors. Through the case study of these two African countries, we will specifically investigate how they display their bargaining power against the backdrop of Chinese and western competition. The rationale behind our choice of these two countries stems from their geographical differences and also their difference in terms of natural resources endowment. Angola, a country in southern Africa, is rich in natural resources such as minerals and petroleum reserves, while Niger, a country in western Africa has fewer natural resources and is usually ranked among the poorest countries in Africa. The study of these two countries will give insight of how countries with differing resource wealth bargain with China and the west.

It is obvious that China's engagement within Africa is motivated by the need for natural resources and also to gain access to consumer markets in the continent. China's presence in Africa is portrayed as an exploitative and imperialist power who swindles African countries out of their natural resources to nurture its growing economy. Concurrently, African countries are usually described as helpless victims of Chinese imperialism and exploitation. China usually responds to these accusations by stressing out the positive aspects of cooperation with African countries.

As China's former ambassador to South Africa Liu Guijin stressed out, the exchanges between China and Africa are far from being idealistic as they are not with other partners such as the European Union and the United States<sup>6</sup>. Prior to his statement, then Chinese-

premier Wen Jia Bao stipulated that "China had selflessly assisted Africa when itself was the poorest. We did not exploit one single drop of oil or extract one single ton of minerals out of Africa.<sup>7</sup>". We suggest the multilateral cooperation or negotiation among African countries, the West and China is needed in the future.

## METHODOLOGY

We use a qualitative case study approach to analyze our data. This study is primarily based on the analysis and the interpretation of the content of these sources and documentations. Throughout this paper, we will make use of multiple sources of information involving the interpretation of both primary (documents, joint statements, contracts) and secondary sources (articles, working papers, books). Major sources for data collection will include newspapers, the publications of the FOCAC, Ministries of Foreign Affairs of China and different African recipients, Government Agencies, opinions of government officials, businessmen and politicians.

We use a case study method to answer to our research question and gain insight of the implications of Chinese foreign aid in Angola and Niger. Our choice of a case study based on the fact that it allows researchers to do an in-depth understanding of a particular phenomenon (Cresswell, 2007). This perspective of the case study is also shared by Bell who stipulated that "a case study approach is particularly appropriate for individual researchers because it gives an opportunity for one aspect of a problem to be studied in some depth within a limited time scale" (Bell, 1999). Therefore, through a case study, this research will look into the agency of Angola and Niger in their relation with China and the West. We chose these countries because they have different level of resource wealth. Angola is rich in natural resources, but Niger is relatively poor and is ranked as one of the poorest countries in Africa. In terms of natural resource endowment, Niger is rich in uranium, and recently oil has been discovered in south-central city of Zinder. Through these cases we will attempt to investigate Chinese relation within two countries different in many terms. Last but not least, our study will also examine the strategies adopted by these countries in their use of China as a bargaining power against traditional donors.

## Case studies of Angola and Niger

In terms of their similarities, Angola and Niger are both located in Sub-Saharan Africa, have experienced of western colonialization in the past, and have increased relation with China. As regards to their dissimilarities, Angola which is a former Portuguese colony is located in Southwestern Africa and bordered by the Atlantic Ocean, whereas Niger is a landlocked country located in western Africa, and a former French colony.

From a political economic perspective, Angola has endured a protracted civil war that lasted for 27 years whereas Niger has relatively been politically stable and has not any experienced civil war since its independence in 1960. From an economic perspective, Angola with its vast natural resources is one of the fastest growing economies in Africa while Niger is ranked among the

6. The term negotiating capital is defined as "the leverage that a negotiator is able to derive from these structural conditions" (Whitfield, L., & Fraser, A.; 2010:347).

7. Speech by Ambassador Liu Guijin at the seminar on China-Africa Relations held by ISS (2004, November 15). Retrieved from <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/zflt/eng/zt/yhjl/t170116.htm>



Figure 1. Map of Angola.

poorest countries in the region. Niger does not possess as much natural resources as Angola (first supplier of oil to China) its political support for the 'One China' policy and its strategic support in global-level forums such as the United Nations, the World Trade Organization is of valuable importance for China. Add to that, Niger is rich in uranium and the recent discovery of oil in the country makes it a non-negligible partner for China. For both countries, China is an attractive source of investment, and as an alternative source of aid, it contributes to the increase of their bargaining power vis-à-vis western donors.

#### **Angolan agency: China as an alternative and bargaining partner**

Angola is a lusophone country located in southwestern Africa. It shares borders with Namibia to the south, the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the north, Zambia to the east, and the Atlantic Ocean to the west (Figure 1). With an area of 1.25 sq. km (481,354 sq. miles) Angola has a population of 29 million. In addition to Portuguese which is the official language, three other major languages are spoken: Umbundu, Kimbundu and Kikongo.

Despite its large oil reserve, Angola is still subject to

socioeconomic issues such as poverty, poor health care and illiteracy. It has been through 27 years of protracted civil war that left the country in ruins with a large number of displaced population. At the end of the war in 2002 there were hopes for a better and peaceful future and reconstructions based on economic development. The economy has improved since then and it is mainly based on the exploitation of natural resources such as petroleum and other commodities. However, in spite of the tremendous economic growth registered in the period following the end of the war, poverty is still rampant with more than 40% of the population living below the poverty line and a high unemployment rate especially among the young population.

China's relation with Angola is based on the provision of technical and financial supports (aid and loans) for infrastructure development. Chinese financial supports offer better options, have a lower interest rate, and longer payment term. Sino-Angolan relation occurs in a period where the country was having tense relation with western institutions. Relations between the southwestern African country and the Bretton woods institutions had been poor for years. Due to issues of endless episodes of hyperinflation and stabilization, there was no lasting agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The World Bank for its part only provides assistance in the domain of emergency and humanitarian assistance



projects since there was no agreed framework with IMF. At the end of the war in 2002, the IMF and many Western donors requested Angola to negotiate a staff-monitored program (SMP). Through this program, the country was supposed to display a positive performance for three trimesters before being able to receive any financial support. However, the Angolan government was reluctant to sign these demands they judged not respectful of their sovereignty, and eventually cancelled negotiations with the Bretton woods institutions. Talks between Angola and the IMF had collapsed several times before, and they usually occurred in period of high commodity prices. This is due to the fact that the bargaining power and assertiveness of commodity rich countries usually increases with the hike in commodity prices. This recantation of the Angolan government is consecutive to the loan agreement with no conditionality attached signed between Angola and China.

In its engagement with China, the Angolan has established a set of institutions which play the role of intermediary actors between its governmental institutions and China. These institutions are meant to convey the interest of Angola to China in order to ensure the projects and loans that are being negotiated go along the country's aspirations and development programs (Mohan and Lampert, 2013). The Angolan ministries identify projects considered important and then forward their proposals to a joint committee called the "Joint Work Program" (Grupo de Trabalho Conjunto) comprising the Angolan Ministry of Finance and China's Ministry of Commerce. The projects are then forwarded to a technical group called GAT (Technical Support Office for the Management of the Chinese Credit Line), which will be in charge of their practical implementations. These projects are realized in concert with China's Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM), which for each project "proposes three to four Chinese companies, while sectorial ministries manage these public works and ensure that staffs are trained" (Mohan and Lampert, 2013).

From this perspective, it goes without saying that the Angolan government is keen on collaborating with China because it not only supports its needs for development but also respects its sovereignty. As an Angolan official puts it, Chinese aid has "no humiliating conditions"<sup>8</sup>. This means that China does not attempt to alter the choices and aspirations of Angola and above all, is respectful of its development model. As Taylor argues, Angolan elites are "deeply appreciative of China's non-interference stance".<sup>9</sup> China empowers the country's need for sovereignty and does not interfere in its internal management. In comparing western versus Chinese presence in Angola, an Angolan national argued, "They

are here for the oil. But why are you here? The American and French think they can give us lessons in ethics and transparency, but all you have done is sneak our oil out from underneath us for forty years. You corrupted everybody; you prolonged the war, especially the Americans... But the Chinese are disciplined. They are respectful and modest (Michel and Beuret, 2009).

For Angola, establishing strong relation with China can be interpreted as an expression of its assertiveness consisting in moving towards a donor, which treats him like a business partner and does not relinquish to invest huge amount of money to support its development programs. Just like Angola, many African countries has turned towards China, a donor that does not interfere in their internal affairs, and does not peremptorily require them to abide by the rule of law. The refusal of the Angolan government to abide by the injunctions of the international institutions and the move towards the Chinese aid model is not only a way for Angola to prevent western countries from interfering in its internal affairs but also a way to compel them to mitigate their critics, and adopt a more conciliatory attitude. Many countries in the continent also use this strategy against the west by undermining their interests through cancellation of resource exploitation rights granted to western multinationals to the benefit of Chinese companies. This strategy of giving resource exploitation contracts to Chinese companies to the detriment of western companies has led many western countries to soften their attitudes and critics towards Angola. Even the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which advocated transparency, accountability in the oil sector as precondition for its aid to Angola in 2002, disbursed \$1.4 billion dollar loan to the country in 2009 despite accusations of high level corruption, lack of transparency and democracy (Leigh et al., 2009).

Also, in 2012, despite discrepancies in the public accounts, the IMF has softened its attitude toward Angola and agreed to provide the remaining \$132.9 m of a package agreed upon in 2009<sup>10</sup>. The "Angolagate" is also an example of how Angola has been successful in using its cooperation with China to increase its bargaining power. The relations between France and Angola have deteriorated over a case of corruption and arm sales called "Angolagate"<sup>11</sup>. In response to the condemnation of a French national accused of arms trades to Angola, the Angolan government deprived Total, the French oil

8. Taylor, I. (2007). Unpacking China's resource diplomacy in Africa. *China in Africa*, 35(10), 1-34.

9. From 1993, China became a net importer of coal, and by 2000, it became the world's largest consumer of concrete, copper, aluminum, iron, steel and most other metals and minerals

10. Cultural Exchanges and Cooperation', China Africa Forum, 21 September 2006, [http://english.focacsummit.org/2006-09/21/content\\_899.htm](http://english.focacsummit.org/2006-09/21/content_899.htm)

11. Africa to Get US\$10 Billion in Loans from China (November 9, 2009), China Briefing retrieved from <http://www.china-briefing.com/news/2009/11/09/africa-to-get-us10-billion-in-loans-from-china.html>; China's loan to Africa focuses on balanced development and trade (China pledges \$20bn in credit for Africa at summit (19 July,2012), BBC News, retrieved from <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-18897451>); on the blossoming of trade between Africa and China, see China's Africa Strategy Blossoms as Relationship Develops (June 8, 2009), China Briefing, retrieved from <http://www.china-briefing.com/news/2009/06/08/chinas-africa-strategy-blossoms-as-relationship-develops.html>

company of its exploitation rights. In 2004, the company was denied a renewal of its license for shallow-water block 3/80 to the detriment of Chinese oil companies, and in 2005, it was compelled to abandon the unexplored acreages in the prolific ultra-deep Block 17, where it had made its biggest discoveries<sup>12</sup>. In a bid to preserve its interest, France in return softened its attitude and tried to limit the damages through diplomatic offensives such as the high profile visit of then French president Nicolas Sarkozy in May 2008<sup>13</sup>. Threatened by the increased Chinese presence and in order to protect its interest in this oil rich country, France made a lot of compromises to the Angolan government<sup>14</sup>. The competition between China and western donors in Angola has given the country the opportunity to play them against each other and empowering itself with the choice of going towards the partner which gives it a better bargain and does not interfere in its internal affairs. As the French reporter Christophe Boisbouvier, argues: "A reconciliation with France will allow Angola to break the deadlock it is facing with China over the reconstruction market in the country. On the French side, Nicolas Sarkozy is of course delighted to open up the Angolan market to companies other than Total"<sup>15</sup>.

### **Niger agency: China as an alternative and bargaining partner**

Niger is a landlocked country in Western Africa, in the border between Sahara and sub-Saharan Africa. Its area covers 1.267 million square kilometers, meaning that it is slightly less than twice the size of France. It has a population of 17,138,707 people that mainly inhabits the fertile southern part of the country. Niger is bordered by Burkina Faso and Mali in its western part, Algeria and Libya in the north, Chad in the east, and Benin and Nigeria in the south (Figure 2: Map of Niger).

Contrary to Angola, Niger has limited natural resources and is usually subject to recurrent droughts resulting in famine throughout the country. Since its independence in 1960, Niger has gone through a series of political instabilities and climate constraints that have stymied its development. In the 1960s and 1970s, Hamani Diori, the country's first president put in place a one party system, which collapsed in 1974 following the 1970s drought.

12. "The Economist (November 19, 2008) Angola-gate: Relation between Angola and France remain troubled <http://www.economist.com/node/12630028>; also see Frynas, J. G., & Paulo, M. (2007). A new scramble for African oil? Historical, political, and business perspectives. *African Affairs*, 106(423).

13. Radio France International (May 23, 2008) France-Angola, Sarkozy in Luanda to repair relations retrieved from [http://www1.rfi.fr/actuen/articles/101/article\\_482.asp](http://www1.rfi.fr/actuen/articles/101/article_482.asp)

14. The Economist (November 19, 2008) Angola-gate: Relation between Angola and France remain troubled <http://www.economist.com/node/12630028>

15. Radio France International (May 23, 2008) France-Angola, Sarkozy in Luanda to repair relations retrieved from [http://www1.rfi.fr/actuen/articles/101/article\\_482.asp](http://www1.rfi.fr/actuen/articles/101/article_482.asp).

Then Seyni Kountché overthrew Hamani Diori after allegations of corruptions. However, the military state and the "one party system" of Kountché's government collapsed with his death in 1987. In the 1990s after the end of the cold war<sup>16</sup>, France and many western countries conditioned their aid to the adoption of democracy and the level of political openness in Africa. Therefore, in Niger a sovereign national conference was organized in 1991 and a democratic constitution was established paving the way to a multiparty political system. However, in 1996, a persistent political deadlock led to a military coup by Lieutenant Colonel Ibrahim Baré Maïnassara. A new constitution was adopted and Baré organized and won the elections, which were widely criticized as being not free and fair. As a result, the opposition parties boycotted his government and refused to participate in the country's institutions. In 1999, Ibrahim Baré Maïnassara was assassinated by his own personal guards, and his chief of staff, Daouda Malam Wanké who became the strong man of Niger. He organized democratic elections by the end of the year and Mamadou Tandja was elected president.

In 2010, in order to remain in power, Tandja organized a referendum to alter the constitution which limited presidential terms. He was subsequently deposed in a coup by a military junta led by Captain Salou Djibo. After a year of transition, a new constitution was drafted, presidential elections were held and Mahamadou Issoufou was elected as president of Niger.

Niger actively takes advantage of the opportunities that lie within its cooperation with China. It is in fact very assertive in this relation and perceives the opportunity that China represents as a provider of financial support, human resources and infrastructures development, as well as other domains. Niger is ranked at the bottom of Human Development Indices, and lacks basic infrastructures to sustain its economic development. The Chinese presence in the country could therefore contribute to the development of these infrastructures to boost Niger's development<sup>17</sup>. As mentioned earlier in the case of Angola, Niger also perceives the Chinese model of cooperation to be respectful of its sovereignty, given that China does not interfere in its domestic affairs unlike western countries whose policies are based on political interferences and conditionalities. For instance, when Niger's president Mamadou Tandja wanted to countercheck the dispositions of the country's constitution by extending his presidential mandate, China did not criticize its decision unlike western donors. China continued to invest in the oil sector and this gave Tandja the financial resources to resist the sanctions and

16. The end of cold war has led to a low demand of uranium production in the country which had a strong impact on the economic situation in the country. The end of cold war has also led to the end the concept of real politic whereby western countries supported their allies in the region with no consideration of their political practices.

17. Xinhua (2016), China offers aid to development projects in Niger, retrieved at [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2016-08/02/c\\_135558453.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2016-08/02/c_135558453.htm)





Figure 2. Political Map of Niger.

criticism of western donors. A former Nigerien minister asserted in this respect that it was because of the Chinese financial support that president Tandja was able to resist the critics and sanctions of the Economic Community of West African States ECOWAS, the European Union and the United States.<sup>18</sup>

Moreover, the Chinese presence in the country has given the Nigerien government a better bargain in dealing with the French mining company, AREVA whose has been exploiting uranium since the country's accession to independence in 1960. In the year 2000, China's need for energy has led to competition with AREVA which exploitation rights of the Arlit and Akolan sites were about to end. With China as an alternative partner, the Nigerien government felt strong enough to ask for the increase in the price of uranium and also of the royalties given by AREVA<sup>19</sup>, things that would have been impossible in the past when the French giant had no competitor in the country<sup>20</sup>. In 2009, fearing competition from China,

18. Jeune Afrique (2010), Chine et France à fonds renversés, <http://www.afriquechine.net/2010/niger+uranium+chine+et+france+a+fronts+renverses.html>

19. The Guardian (2014), Niger fails to reach uranium mining deal with French nuclear firm Areva (<http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2014/feb/28/niger-fails-uranium-mining-deal-french-firm-areva>)

20. Grégoire, E. (2011). Niger: un État à forte teneur en uranium. Hérodote, (3), 206-225. Also see Daniel Flynn and Geert De Clercq (2014), Special Report: Areva and Niger's uranium fight, [http://www.economista.es/empresas-](http://www.economista.es/empresas-finanzas/noticias/5516783/02/14/Special-Report-Areva-and-Nigers-uranium-fight.html)

AREVA accepted to increase the price of uranium from US \$31 per kilogram to US \$94 per kilogram, which was higher than the international standard price of US \$65/kilogram. This price would be adjusted to international norms after the Fukushima disaster in 2011.

Not only did Niger's president use China's financial support in the oil sector as a bargaining power, he also used the Chinese increased interest in uranium to gain political support from France. In order to get the French government to support his political move in changing the constitution, Tandja played the "China card" by threatening to grant the exploitation rights of the Imouraren site to China. Tandja eventually won the support of France, with president Sarkozy stipulating that his move to alter the constitution was justified since it would lead to stability and democratic progress in the country (Grégoire, 2011)<sup>21</sup>. The French government support granted AREVA, the right to exploit the Imouraren site to the detriment of China. The conciliatory attitude of the French government to Tandja could be interpreted by its willingness to preserve its economic and energy interests as uranium is crucial to France's energy. In 2008, Nigerien uranium contributed 1/3 to

[finanzas/noticias/5516783/02/14/Special-Report-Areva-and-Nigers-uranium-fight.html](http://www1.rfi.fr/actuen/articles/101/article_482.asp)

21. Radio France International (May 23, 2008) France-Angola, Sarkozy in Luanda to repair relations retrieved from [http://www1.rfi.fr/actuen/articles/101/article\\_482.asp](http://www1.rfi.fr/actuen/articles/101/article_482.asp).

France's nuclear facilities and was about 50% of France's supplies in 2015<sup>22</sup>.

Therefore, the growing presence of China in the Nigerien energy sector has increased its bargaining power against AREVA, the giant French mining company that has been extracting uranium in Niger for the last 40 years<sup>23</sup>. However, in the oil sector, the extreme dominance of China has a reverse effect on the assertiveness of the Nigerien government. Being the main exploiter of the Nigerien oil, China has full control of the flow of investment in this sector. Contrary to the uranium sector where Niger has a strong bargaining power, in the oil sector, it has a weaker position and is not able to dictate its will to China or even turn towards an alternative investor<sup>24</sup>. For instance, in August 2015 China shut down the Soraz refinery when a conflict of interest arose between Sonidep, the Nigerien state petroleum company and the China National Petroleum Corporation (Ibrahim, 2015)<sup>25</sup>. Soraz is the result of a joint venture between China and the Nigerien government. It is owned to 60% by China and 40% by the Nigerien government. This means that Soraz is fully managed by the CNPC, which also operates the wells and pipeline of the refinery. The Nigerien government has to purchase its oil from Soraz, which pays CNPC for the extraction. This situation of inter-dependence is in fact a way to smooth out the power imbalance between CNPC, the Chinese state company and Sonidep. However, due to mismanagement and corruption in this sector, Sonidep the Nigerien oil company owes \$68 million to Soraz, which in turns has a debt of \$100 million to the CNPC. Based on an arrangement between the Nigerien government and CNPC in 2012, the Nigerien government bought its oil at \$70 a barrel, a price lower than the international standards. This gave the Nigerien government the opportunity to have the cheapest petroleum in Western Africa. However, when the price of crude oil dropped to \$50 a barrel in 2015, CNPC was reluctant to lower its price and the Nigerien government had to pay its oil at a price higher than the price on the international market. Therefore, the refinery was shut down by the CNPC as a result of disagreement between China and Niger<sup>26</sup>. Meanwhile, it can also be said that

this is for China a way for to force its Nigerien counterpart to accept its conditions. This situation highlights the issue of a powerful state imposing itself to a weak and poor country, which lacks enough bargaining power to resist the overbearing stance of the stronger state. Add to that, the Nigerien Petroleum Ministry does not have any control over CNPC's management of the refinery. This shows the country's weakness in the management of its oil resources, giving way to Chinese absolute control of the sector. The weak position of the Nigerien government vis-à-vis China stems not only from its inability to establish special institutions to deal with China as in the case of Angola but also from the prominent role played by China on the oil sector.

## Conclusion

African agency refers to the growing assertiveness of African countries on the world stage. This assertiveness has increased a great deal with the emergence of Chinese trade and investment on the continent, which means that relationship with China has given African countries the possibility to resist the conditionality based policies of western countries. It has also allowed these countries to have more say over the aid and development programs endowing them with the ability to choose their partners based on their interests and needs for development.

Our case study of the Angolan and Nigerien agencies shows that both countries use China as a bargaining chip, either to resist the policy injunction of western countries or to gain economic or political support from the west. Many play the "China card" as a mean to prevent western interference into their domestic issues. Thus, in terms of preferences, China's emergence as a donor who does not interfere in their domestic issues is preferred to western donors whose cooperation is subject to conditionalities. With the growing importance of China as an alternative partner in Africa, this trend is observable within many other countries in the region, particularly countries which have abundant natural resources. For instance, countries such as Zimbabwe (Youde, 2007), Nigeria (NAİM, 2007), Equatorial Guinea, Chad (John, 2012), have been able to resist sanctions from western countries and also International Financial Institutions such as the World Bank, thanks to their engagement with China.

In the case of Niger, the weak bargaining power of Niamey in the oil sector stems from the fact that China is the main investor in the oil industry, which strongly impact the assertiveness of Niger in this sector. Therefore, Niamey does not enjoy the same level of bargaining power that it has in the uranium sector. In the mineral sector, competition between China and France has

22. The end of the cold war has led to a low demand of uranium production in the country which had a strong impact on the economic situation in the country. The end of the cold war has also led to the end of the concept of real politics whereby western countries supported their allies in the region with no consideration of their political practices.

23. Xinhua (2016), China offers aid to development projects in Niger, retrieved at [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2016-08/02/c\\_135558453.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2016-08/02/c_135558453.htm).

24. Jeune Afrique (2010), Chine et France à fonds renversés, <http://www.afriquechine.net/2010/niger+uranium+chine+et+france+a+fronts+r+enverses.html>.

25. The Guardian (2014), Niger fails to reach uranium mining deal with French nuclear firm Areva (<http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2014/feb/28/niger-fails-uranium-mining-deal-french-firm-areva>).

26. Grégoire, E. (2011). Niger: un État à forte teneur en uranium. *Hérodote*, (3), 206-225. Also see Daniel Flynn and Geert De Clercq (2014), Special Report: Areva and Niger's uranium fight, [http://www.economista.es/empresas-](http://www.economista.es/empresas-finanzas/noticias/5516783/02/14/Special-Report-Areva-and-Nigers-uranium-fight.html)

[finanzas/noticias/5516783/02/14/Special-Report-Areva-and-Nigers-uranium-fight.html](http://www.economista.es/empresas-finanzas/noticias/5516783/02/14/Special-Report-Areva-and-Nigers-uranium-fight.html)).

allowed the Nigerien government to play the two actors against each other, leveraging by this token a higher level of political and economic interests.

Angola for its part is able to leverage a higher level of bargaining power than Niger, this is because, there are companies involved in the exploitation of resources in the Angolan natural resource sector. For instance, French companies such as Total, BP (United Kingdom), Chevron and ExxonMobil (United States) are all involved in the exploitation of oil, alongside Chinese oil companies (Burgis, 2015). Against this backdrop of competition between Chinese and western companies, Angola uses China as a bargaining power to resist the policy injunction of western countries by threatening the interests of their companies involved in the exploitation of oil. Moreover, unlike Niger, Angola has established bespoke institutions to manage its relation with China, based on its needs for infrastructure development and technology transfers. The Angolan government is able to control the exploitation of all the sectors of its natural resources by giving benefit to those countries, which are respectful of its sovereignty, and refusing to cooperate with those attempting to interfere in its internal affairs.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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